Baked Alaska

Resources for school RE for students aged 13-18 about climate change inspired by the Riding Lights Theatre Company show which asks...

Can we save the planet?

This is one of seven files of teaching and learning ideas, useful in RE and RME, where issues about ethics, theology and climate change are explored with young people. Each file of lesson ideas is accompanied by a PowerPoint sequence for teachers to use as they introduce the complex ethics of climate to their students.

The work draws upon ideas from Christianity and other religions and worldviews but the key focus is on human and humane values. Each of the seven units relates to a film clip from the stage show.

Unit 2: Risky Business
Greed could kill us all!

In this unit, the film explores how fossil fuel companies must face the dilemma of profit versus climate safety. Is there such a thing as corporate greed? What effects does this have? Jesus’ Parable of the Rich Fool is applied to life at the top of an oil company, asking whether the pursuit of profit without morality is stupid.

British Values

Schools promote the values of tolerance, respect, individual liberty, democracy and the rule of law. This work contributes to exploring this area by examining a clash of values. We are raising challenging questions about the limits of individual liberty: should billionaires be free to make even more money when their actions show no respect for the Earth and all our futures?

Curriculum connections

The learning objectives in this work connect to GCSE, Scottish RME and RE outcomes for 14-year-olds, including enabling learners to:
- Explain connections between religion and belief and environmental ethics;
- Give reasons for their views about climate change and its impacts on humanity;
- Consider arguments for climate justice;
- Develop their analysis of the challenges faced by this generation on Earth about the future of the planet.

GCSE RS requires the study of:
- The value of the world and the duty of human beings to protect it, including religious teaching about stewardship, dominion, responsibility, awe and wonder.
- The use and abuse of the environment, including the use of natural resources and pollution.
- The concepts of sanctity of life and the quality of life.

In Scotland, this work connects to the intention that the RME Curriculum enables students to:
- Apply developing understanding of morality to consider a range of moral dilemmas in order to find ways which could promote a more just and compassionate society.

RME 4-02b

Summary of the film
Risky Business (approximate length 10:20)

The film explores the idea of corporate greed, using a Parable of Jesus about a rich man who cared only for his own ease, and nothing for his neighbours, workers or fellow humans. Ignoring death, in the end his greed consumes him. But you can't take it with you.

Through a narrative that applies the parable to a fictional oil CEO and company, the drama shows how corporate greed is a mighty obstacle to serious and effective responses to climate change which are characterised by justice. We could all be overwhelmed by the greedy few.

But the terminal folly of placing greed above love, or solidarity, or co-operation, or even survival is also exposed.

In a sinking ship, holding onto your gold is senseless as well as greedy. The Earth is a ship, just one ship, slowly sinking.
### Learning Activity 1: The Fossil Fuel Fool

Watch clip 2 with the class.
Read from the Christian Bible the Parable of the Rich Fool, on which the first half of the clip is based, from Luke 12:16-21:

> Jesus said: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’

> “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

Discuss these questions:
- What did the drama writer get from the Bible?
- What has the dramatisation added to the Bible?
- Jesus had never heard of climate change and climate justice. But is his parable relevant to our current crisis? How?
- What does it mean to be ‘rich towards God’? Is it similar to being generous?

### Learning Activity 2: Quick on the draw

- Following the discussion, play the soundtrack of the first half of the clip to your class again (blank the visuals), and ask them as they hear it to sketch simultaneously the character of the Fossil Fuel Fool.
- They might pick these details: he can turn a blind eye, stuff his ears with money, scour green pastures, pump and frack. He can – and does – talk to his own soul about stillness. He imagines his own future on a mountaintop palace as the waters of global warming rise. Take just 3 minutes for this, and put the cartoons up around the class for a quick look and to choose some favourites. Who did what well?
- Ask students to give out three ticks to the ones they like best, as a way of judging. Discuss.

### Learning Activity 3: Dilemmas and Decisions

- This activity uses 5 multi-path narratives which set a dilemma related to ecological issues for students to respond to. The narratives are a good way of making the political, global and complex personal both simple and stark. Point out to students that our global future is a kind of real-life, scary, high-stakes ‘multipath narrative’!
- If you wish, play it like a game. Take 5 volunteers to come to the front of class. Read (or get other students to read) the dilemma to one student. Pause before they give their views, and all other students must guess whether they will say ‘yes’ or ‘no’. To prevent fraud (!) have them write their guess down next to a number.
- Ask the students answering the dilemmas to explain their choices and ideas.
- Use the two questions at the end of each dilemma – one ethical, one religious – to develop learning and thinking. Ask your students to keep notes for a writing task if you wish.
- When the 5 dilemmas and discussions are complete, ask students in pairs to note what they have been thinking about and what they have learned.

### Learning Activity 4: Write your own dilemma

- Use the writing frame on the sixth dilemma page below to get students, in pairs, to write some more multi-path ethical dilemmas about ecology and climate justice.
- A class of thirty will produce 15 new dilemmas. Arrange them into groups of about 6 and get them to play ‘dilemmas and decisions’ with the best examples of these new dilemmas.
**Dilemmas and Decisions: How green are you?**

**Situation A: Litter and responsibility**

You are walking through a local park that is particularly well kept and beautiful: you love it, and often walk there. You see a young teenager screwing up their fish and chip paper and chucking it onto the grass. There is a litter bin not 10 metres away. The teenager is not large, or rough looking, so you don’t feel scared – there are other people around, and it is broad daylight.

Do you speak to the young person and ask them to put their rubbish in the bin?

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<td>The youth looks you up and down, and laughs. S/he tells you to get stuffed. ‘You care about litter? Pick it up yourself if it makes you so irritated.’ Do you pick up the chip papers and take them to the bin, in front of the young person?</td>
<td>You decide not to say anything, but then the teenager goes over to the bin, and starts rummaging through it, as if looking for something. As they do this, they are throwing big handfuls of other rubbish out of the bin on to the surrounding grass and flower beds. Do you now speak to the youth about the littering, asking them to tidy up?</td>
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<td>Yes: See below</td>
<td>No: Situation ends</td>
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<td>You put the chip paper in the bin. The young person is angry and laughing at you. S/he grabs the wrappers back out of the bin and throws them to the ground again. You can see that this might develop into a tussle. Do you take the rubbish with you and walk away, to put it in another bin once the youth is out of sight?</td>
<td>You then see what the youth was after: a glass bottle, which s/he wants to use as a football. The bottle is being kicked around on the path, where it looks likely to smash. The path leads to the small children’s play area. Do you now speak up about the danger, even though you chose not to speak up about the littering?</td>
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**Questions for discussion: responsibility for our environment**

Litter in local parks can be annoying and spoil the view. But global ‘littering’ is clogging up the planet with human waste. Dead whales are found with tonnes of plastic in their stomachs. What can individuals, communities, companies and governments do about the way humans waste stuff, and pollute the Earth?

In Christian belief, God has made humanity stewards of the Earth, carers for the planet. If this belief is put into action by the world’s Christians, what difference would it make? Create a list of possible impacts.
**Dilemmas and Decisions**

**Situation B: Rare species: worth protection? The biodiversity issue**

You inherit a small plot of land from your farming aunt when she dies. It is a half-acre of empty land with planning permission to build a house, so it might be worth a tidy sum of money. You have money to build the house, and plan to do so. You visit the half-acre just before the bulldozers come to clear it for the building, and while there you notice a small but rather unusual butterfly, resting on the flowering bushes that grow on your land. You are no expert, but you wonder if this is as rare a species as you think it could be. Then the idea of checking it out with conservationists seems to you to be likely to delay your house-building. Do you ignore the butterfly, and send in the bulldozers without checking if it is a rare species?

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<td>The following day, the builders ring you. They have stopped work. They say ‘Guv, we have discovered several of these rare butterflies on the land. They’re really unusual. We should not be destroying their habitat. Shall we call the environmental people to come out and take a look?</td>
<td>You call in the Environment Office from the local authority and they are pleased to tell you that this is a very rare species, but there is no law against you building the house. They tell you ‘in cases like these, we like to compensate owners of the land for leaving it in a natural state, but we have few funds. We know you might make £100,000 out of the building, but we can only offer you £5,000 to keep the land as it is for the next 5 years.’ Do you refuse the £5k and carry on with your plans to build?</td>
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<td>An environmental officer from the local authority comes to see what they have spotted, and identifies the butterflies: an endangered species rarely found in your part of the country. You are asked not to build on the land, because it will destroy the habitat. You see that if you agree then your hopes of making a profit from your aunt’s legacy will be zeroed. Do you agree to the request to abandon your building plans and save the butterflies?</td>
<td>You take the £5k and dismiss the building team, thinking rather ruefully ‘at least I have saved a butterfly.’ But then next week, when you go to the site you are furious to find that insect-photographers have been there, taking butterfly pictures, but they have trampled the bushes where the butterfly lives flat, and ruined the habitat. There are no butterflies left. Do you now go ahead with your building and money-making plans rather than see if the habitat can be repaired and the butterflies lured back?</td>
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**Questions for discussion: biodiversity**

This is a local example of issues about biodiversity and the value of different species. But globally, one responsible estimate suggests that a quarter of all mammal species on the planet could be extinct within 20 years. The importance of working to protect and preserve biodiversity is not just that we like tigers and snow leopards: the human race is dependent on biodiversity in hundreds of ways. So what should individuals, governments, companies and charities do to preserve a biodiverse planet?

The biblical creation narratives (myths? stories?). Picture God creating every species. The Noah story shows divine care for all creatures. If God loves biodiversity and all species, how should believers in God respond to climate change?
Dilemmas and Decisions

Situation C: Consumer Power: can you shop to be greener?

There is a large company whose products for health and beauty you buy regularly, for yourself and as gifts. They are your favourites, and worth every penny. You learn that this company has been heavily criticised by environmental charities because its petrochemical research and development does major damage to local environments and is dogged by pollution and greenhouse-gas scandals. A quick search shows you that your favourite company is by far the worst among its competitors for environmental damage and pollution.

Do you take little notice of this and continue to buy the company’s products as before?

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<td>Your health and beauty products continue to impress, but there is, a few weeks later, a big news story about your favourite company: their record is so bad that indigenous peoples across America, north and south, are camping on their land to protest against environmental damage and even the near extinction of some species of wildlife because of their work. You research a little, and find the company’s basic attitude is ‘everyone’s doing it, and we’re making money. We won’t change.’</td>
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| You try out some alternative products, and find them just as good as those you have been using, to your relief. Through the post comes a leaflet from a global environment charity, asking you to sign a petition and make a donation of £20 to their campaign against the company from which you have stopped buying. Out of interest you read their case studies, and you are appalled to discover what damage the company has done to the lands and homes of indigenous peoples in America (north and south).

Rather than sign the petition and send the donation of £20, do you throw the mailing in the bin (for recycling)? |
| Yes: Situation ends. No: See below |

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| You head out to do Christmas shopping, expecting to buy lots of your favourite health and beauty items for friends and family. Outside the store, you are confronted by a campaign group, including a good friend of yours, who show pictures of the ruined rainforests and polluted streams that your company is responsible for! ‘Buy elsewhere’ they urge you. The pictures are appalling.

Do you still continue to shop till you drop for your favourite products, even though you are pretty sure the environmental damage stories are true? |
| You receive another mailing from the charity, thanking you for the donation, and telling the story of their campaign. They are having some success by setting up pickets outside stores to ask people not to buy the products you used to use. The company is taking the need to change their ways seriously because of the bad publicity caused by this picket and potential boycott. But the charity needs volunteers, willing to give 4 hours on Saturdays to maintain their picket. They ask if you will volunteer, one weekend per month.

Do you volunteer your time at the weekends for this cause? |

Questions for discussion: using your spending power

This is a dilemma about consumer power. If governments and major companies are to be persuaded that the struggle to deal with climate change matters, it will be by ordinary people in their millions (billions?) doing the job. But it would be easy to give time and energy for a certain result, a definite outcome. Why is this such a tricky campaign message: ‘if we all try really hard, we may succeed – but we may fail anyway’?

Christianity calls on all its followers to ‘trust God, pray hard and take action’. Christian Aid uses the slogans ‘Give Act Pray’ and ‘We believe in life before death.’ Since there are about 2.4 billion Christians on the planet, could they make a difference to climate change? What would need to happen to make Christianity ‘deeper green’?
**Dilemmas and Decisions**

**Situation D: Climate change – leaks and falsehoods**

You are a young journalist on a national newspaper, and you have been working on a story about climate change. The situation is that a government department in your country is suspected of falsifying the figures it publishes about carbon emissions, so that they can claim to be meeting agreed targets for energy efficiency. You have some good evidence from a ‘leaky source’ inside the government department that the minister may have been less than 100% truthful in a statement. It is a big story. You neither support nor oppose the party in government particularly strongly. You go to your editor with the story, but the editor says, ‘Ah, no, we won’t be publishing that. Ask no questions Junior.’ The atmosphere suddenly feels rather heavy.

Do you knuckle under and do as your editor says, without asking any questions?

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| You put your efforts into other stories and let the climate change story go to the bottom of the pile. But a couple of weeks later, your leaky source sends you secretly a copy of a memo from inside the government department which proves that the government has been secretly falsifying its carbon emissions and claiming wrongly to be meeting its targets for over two years. You think it would be a huge story. But when you take the memo and show your editor, he says, ‘Give that to me please.’ And takes it from you. You watch him put it through the shredder (he does not know you have kept a copy!). ‘Don’t risk your future’ he advises. But you consider your options, and realise you could go to another news source to share your inside information. Do you, taking precautions to be secretive, give the damning memo to one of your newspaper’s rivals?

Yes: See below.  
No: Situation ends |

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| The memo is published by your rival, and the story is huge. A government minister has to resign and the Prime Minister is in trouble about the case. Then your editor calls you in for a ‘difficult conversation’. You fear you will be sacked, but he just tells you that even if you were the source of the leaked story, then he will keep you on the staff, on condition that you never investigate these issues again. You smell a rat. Several rats! You think your paper is corrupt. Despite your good salary and prospects, do you resign?

Yes: Situation ends  
No: See below |

| Questions for discussion: vested interests – can they be challenged? |
| Tobacco firms denied that smoking causes cancer for decades, paying scientists to do studies that would support them. This is a dilemma about the secrecy and threats of vested interests defending themselves. Do you believe that big companies and governments will go to any lengths to deny climate change if it loses them money? Who could control the major companies and big governments if this were happening?

Christianity teaches that mighty rulers and the proud and greedy rich will be judged by God. What do you think might be God’s message to our planet and our rulers about climate change? Write it like a prophecy! |
Dilemmas and Decisions

Situation E: Church minister, difficult choices

You are the minister of a church in your local town. Your congregation of about 200 people is mixed, young and old, from many different ethnic groups. They are very committed to Christianity, but as their minister, you wonder if they have really thought about the message of a ‘green God’ who loves the Earth, and whether, in an age of climate change, churches should do more to work for sustainable ecology. You suggest to the Church Council that you plan a series of 6 sermons on ecology and the Christian faith, and after six weeks, join in with Christian Aid’s week of action on climate change and poverty by running fundraising and awareness raising events in the local community. There is a discussion. Some people say that the church should concentrate on helping the homeless locally and preaching the message of Jesus to invite people to become Christians. Others say your idea is a good one. The vote is 6 in favour, 6 against. Do you go ahead and plan the sermons and the week of action?

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<td>Do you reject the Church Council’s view and plan further work with Christian Aid?</td>
<td>Members of the Church Council who voted for the ‘Green Action Week’ are disappointed, and come to you with four suggestions. Have a voluntary Bible study group on green issues, replace all lightbulbs with low energy ones, become a ‘Fairtrade Church’ and turn Harvest Festival into a one-off event to promote action against climate change.</td>
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Christian Aid make a short film about your church, and you even make national news. You find several dozen other congregations who want to follow the example of your plan, and the excitement of being part of a movement is great. But about 30 people in your congregation are pretty unhappy. ‘Reverend,’ they say, ‘you have changed the whole focus and emphasis of our church recently and we don’t feel part of it and we don’t feel we belong. Will it be changing back, or should we look for another church to join?’

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<td>Do you tell them to go ahead and leave, rather than balancing your green work more in favour of their Christian traditions?</td>
<td>Your church life carries on much as before. But one of your Mission Partners, to whom your congregation has been giving money for years, sends a letter from their church in a very poor part of the South Pacific. They tell you that their church building is being flooded three or four times a year (it is on low lying land by the coast, and sea levels have been rising). They explain that this is an effect of climate change, and ask if you can raise funds to contribute to rebuilding the church on higher ground.</td>
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Questions for discussion: Christian communities: how should they respond?

This dilemma is a personal one for the church minister, but it reflects the realities of Britain’s 30,000+ churches, not many of which have been much bothered about green issues. What holds them back from ecological ethics?

Jesus himself was tuned in to the natural world. He talked about grain, lilies, wild flowers, grass, sparrows, pigeons, foxes, pigs, camels: should Christians who want to follow his example be nature lovers?
Dilemmas and Decisions – select an issue yourself, write a dilemma of your own.

Situation F: Write your own dilemma about climate change and the environment, with two branches on each side, making it harder and harder to go on saying ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Try it out with other students.

You are...

Do you... (a question with a yes/no answer)

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No: Situation ends

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The big questions your dilemma raises: